



Hillary Erasmus

1 Mall leads the way

Complex urban living

"We wanted to create a new development with a complexity of urban living to show 'new urbanism' could work in South Africa," Vines, who vehemently dislikes malls, points out. "Wandering around a real town would seem to be a far more enriching experience for young people than malls, which constitute their social reality," says Vines.

Cowie Holdings, the first developer to invest in Bridge City, had to be coaxed into accepting it would have to develop residential above the almost-complete mall, says Duvenage. "Some 800 apartments will be built in tower blocks above the mall in a second phase. Mixed-use is not a new idea; the most successful First World cities are mixed-use."

Vines expresses his disappointment at little success in attracting lower-level retail entrepreneurs from INK to the new mall; mainly bigger players as tenants. Inclusion of SMMEs is part of the vision of the whole development, including upcoming developers.

The plight of upcoming developers

A creative solution to the residential stalemate and the lack of low-level developers may be in the form of International Housing Solutions (IHS). Gwala believes the US-based IHS will be the credible partner SMME housing developers will need in the face of stringent parameters defined by the National Credit Act. "IHS would work with up-and-coming developers who do not have the track record or technical ability for a development of this nature," says Gwala. IHS has experience with similar developments in other corners of the globe. "It is very keen to be part of the development; it would act as co-developer and co-funder. Unlike short-term financiers, we would withdraw once it was up and running whereas IHS would stay on and consider acquiring rental stock."

What makes Bridge City so attractive to the IHS at a time when everyone is avoiding residential like the plague? "A number of reasons,"

says Gwala. "Bridge City is a high-profile project and the IHS has a vision to uplift emerging developers and entrepreneurs in line with the aims of this public-private partnership with residential as the lead product."

Entry-level developers, who have dared to venture into this field, have not been successful so far. "We were negotiating the sale of one of the blocks to a SMME development group, which has battled to raise the money," says Ive. Another developer – Yellow Point – has delayed construction despite initial eagerness to get going as soon as possible. "I suspect this is a strategic delay as it waits for the mall to get off the ground," adds Ive.

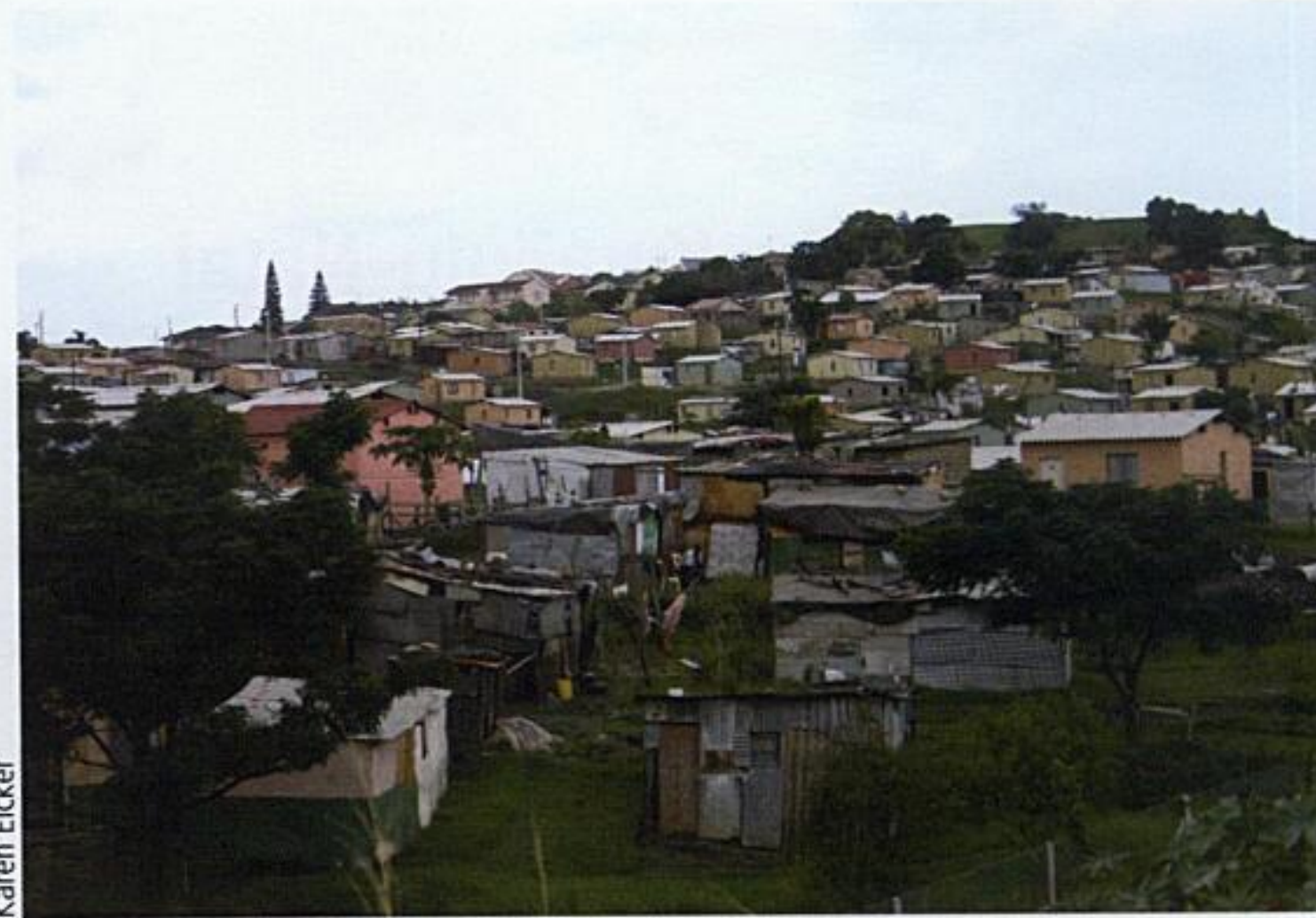
Market research for two blocks

In the meantime, a developer has shown interest in developing two city blocks with the option to test the viability on the proposed residential component over a stipulated period of time. Market research is required in any new development, particularly in the INK region where units ranging in price between R400 000 to R800 000 constitute a new product. In addition, these units would be in a yet-to-be-developed, mixed-use town centre, which is essentially a new concept for KwaZulu-Natal and the eThekweni market.

Old Mutual Investment Group Property Investments has approached Effingham Development Joint Venture about a retail operation and, as with Cowie Holdings, Effingham is insisting on including mixed-use development as part of the project.

Interest impetus – hospital and court

As mentioned previously, two government buildings expected to give impetus to increased development and construction activity are the hospital and magistrates' court. "Doctors will need consulting rooms for clients and lawyers will need chambers in close prox-



Karen Eicker

2 Filling the buffer zone

imity so there are real opportunities for commercial space," says Gwala. "The Department of Health has indicated it would need bedsitter apartments as it no longer builds nurses' quarters," says Duvenage. Many employed at the magistrates' court may opt to live in a modern flat rather than existing or makeshift rental accommodation in the INK area. According to Ive, construction of the hospital is likely to start towards the end of 2009 while work on the magistrates' court is imminent.

Foreign concept

How has the design team found the response from the clients and developers at the design stage? "In most cases, the professional teams know what they are doing and provide good proposals," says Duvenage. "Only in a few instances have they disregarded them." This is usually the result of not understanding the actual concept of Bridge City. For example, initially, the Department of Health wanted single-storey buildings over 20 ha but this would not fit into the high-density development. "Eventually the department agreed to multi-level structures on 6 ha," says Vines. "It was reluctant at first but, over time, as it realised it was a different idea – a town centre with potential for 25 000 residents – it modified its standard formula."

Station and intermodal transport facility

Nic Poulsen of MDS Architects and Duvenage have designed the underground station and multi-modal transport interchange.

Commuters will be carried by rail to the city centre with an intermodal transport facility to serve as the transfer point between taxis, buses and trains. The buses will cover certain routes not covered by the train while the train will run into town and in time possibly to the airport and elsewhere. Construction of the facility is under way and is due for completion